

Lafayette Historical Society

POST OFFICE BOX 133 LAFAYETTE, CALIF. 94549

NEWSLETTER

President: Marechal Duncan (283-6812)

Lafayette, California

May, 1996

Vol. 23, No. 2

1996 Annual Pot Luck Dinner

Date:	Tuesday, May 14, 1996	
Time:	6 PM	Social Hour
	7 PM	Dinner
	8 PM	Short business meeting, followed by:
Speaker:	Eugene Metz discusses <i>The John Marsh Historic House— Past, Present and Future(?)</i>	
Place:	Lafayette Veterans Memorial Hall, 1st Street and Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette	
Questions:	Dick Johnson (283-0199), Keith Blakeney (284-2221) or Ollie Hamlin (283-6822)	

Here it is again, time for our biggest blowout of the year, and we've planned a great time for you. Be sure to reserve the date and put it on your calendar right now. Each family should bring its favorite casserole or salad, large enough to serve 6 to 8 people. Board members will provide dessert and LHS will provide wine and coffee. The no-host bar will be open for business promptly at 6 PM.

Our program for the evening is: *The John Marsh Historic House—Past, Present and Future(?)*

This historical building and the man behind it are a subject of great interest and curiosity. Scarcely a one of us hasn't driven along the Brentwood Road in East Contra Costa at one time or another. Passing through this pastoral area, you sense it has changed little since the days it was inhabited by Indians. Then you round a bend and are suddenly confronted with the sight of an impressively large, stone relic of the past, seemingly in the middle of nowhere, slowly deteriorating with the passage of time and lack of maintenance. It's hard not to speculate about the wealth, gran-

deur and power it must have represented in the past.

We will have the opportunity at our Annual Potluck to get the real facts about this local wonder. We'll hear the true story about John Marsh, the dynamic man who played such a significant role in the development of California during this critical period. We will learn about his achievements, successes and tragedies.

We are indeed fortunate to have as our speaker for this evening Mr. Eugene Metz. Mr. Metz is a distinguished architect, a member of the Board of Directors of the John Marsh Historic Trust, and is Director of the John Marsh Historic House Restoration. He brings over 35 years experience in architecture, having served in many high-profile capacities, such as the University of California's Director of Design and Construction Services, in which he supervised over \$300 million of renovations and new construction.

Mr. Metz has addressed many other groups such as ours, and our research confirms we will be highly satisfied with his presentation.

- by Keith Blakeney, Program Chair

John Marsh and the Great Stone House

Stingy, controversial, moody, scholarly, be-friender of Indians, skilled surgeon and medical Practitioner, patriot-promoter of emigration. All these qualities have been attributed to "Doctor" John Marsh. Massachusetts-born, Harvard-educated, he left the East, leaving behind in Illinois his son Charles and the grave of his beloved Marguerite and new-born daughter, and made his way to California. In 1837 he purchased Los Meganos, a rancho of four leagues, or 17,752 acres, from José Noriega. There Marsh moved in 1838, becoming the first American settler in Contra Costa County.

Across Marsh Creek from an Indian village he built a four-room adobe, with attic. Here were his vineyards and fruit trees; on the hills and plains grazed his cattle. On the south bank of the San Joaquin River at Marsh's Landing he constructed a smokehouse and slaughterhouse. Marsh converted to Roman Catholi-

cism and became a citizen of Mexico in 1844. He was forty-five years old and had found his home.

John Marsh was the first person to practice medicine in the San Joaquin Valley and an acknowledged expert. It was his high fees, extracted in cattle, which aroused resentment. Although on good terms with Gen. M. G. Vallejo, and refusing to join in John Fremont's activities, Marsh did encourage emigration to California, primarily through a series of letters to newspapers in Missouri. The Bidwell-Bartleson Party (1841) was the first of many he welcomed to California.

Ten years later John Marsh married Abbie Tuck and brought her back to the adobe on the creek. Alice, their daughter, was born there a year later. It was for Abbie that Marsh ordered a suitable home built. Designed by a San Francisco architect, and built by contractors from the City, it was

to be an imposing blend of manor house and castle, unlike any other in the state. This was the great "Stone House" on Marsh Creek. Stone for the building was quarried nearby and bricks burned on the property. There were three full stories and a four-story tower from which Marsh could look for cattle rustlers. The earthquake of 1868 was to severely damage the tower, but by then Marsh and his dreams had died.

Abbie, never in good health, succumbed in 1855. Marsh was murdered the following year. They were not to live in the Stone House. How-



ever, Charles Marsh had reunited with his father. He and little Alice inherited Los Meganos, which they sold in 1871.

Following that, a series of owners bought the property, or parcels of it, including Balfour, Guthrie and Company, and the Cowell Portland Cement Company. The latter deeded the home property to Contra Costa County, and there was an unsuccessful attempt by the Regional Park District to develop it. The home property then came into State hands.

Deserted, forlorn yet imposing, this great Stone House, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, awaits the future.

- by Ruth Dyer



President's Message

I'm sure it was beyond their wildest dreams, twenty-eight years ago, when a small group of community-minded citizens met and established what later became the Lafayette Historical Society. "What," you might ask, "was beyond their wildest dreams?" The computer age is here, and Lafayette's history, from Elam Brown to the present, will soon be available to the world via the Internet. Our archives will be scanned; photographs, documents and objects will be digitized for viewing over the 'Net. Textual documents can be presented in a way that offers excellent cataloging, searching and indexing of all available information. Lafayette Historical Society will be Online!

As noted in the flyer sent to our members a few weeks ago, Lafayette Online is a collaboration of the Lafayette Arts and Science Foundation (LASF), the Lafayette School District and the Acalanes High School District. Bob Gianini, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Lafayette School District; Anne Partridge and John Kestell, Lafayette Library; Tim McCreery, parent and technology buff; Ruth Dyer and myself from the Lafayette Historical Society have met for the organization phase of the project. Many people from the schools, the library, and the historical society will become involved.

This project is a tremendous challenge and a learning experience for the whole community. So wake up, LHS members, and let's *Get Online!*

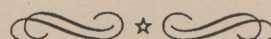
Dues are were Due

Regular annual LHS dues are \$10 per family, and are due, and *payable*, in January of each year. If you've not paid for '96, please send your check to Lafayette Historical Society, PO Box 133, Lafayette, CA 94549. If you have questions, call Ollie Hamlin, Membership Chair, at 283-6822. Many thanks.

Newsletter Editor Appointed

The Board of Directors is pleased to announce that Gary Willcuts has been appointed Editor of the Society's newsletter. He has also been appointed to the Board. Gary will fill the balance of Elly Conrad's term, following her resignation. The Board also expresses its appreciation to Elly for her past service.

Gary's phone is 283-0706; he'd love to hear your thoughts, bad or good, about the newsletter, and how to make it more interesting to you.

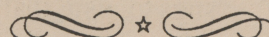


New Life Members

We'd like to congratulate, and say "Thank You" to the following members who have become LIFE MEMBERS in 1996. We now have a total of 33 Life Members.

James M. Craig
Hart and Betty Fairclough
Michael and Joan Heller
Mabel C. Koshland
Brad and Diana Sage
Paul and Frances Sheehan
Marjorie L. Stolley
Thomas and Janice Titmus
Tom and Pat Whitten
Betsy and Gary Willcuts

Life Memberships call for a one-time contribution of \$100. For more information call Ollie Hamlin (283-6822) or write to LHS, PO Box 133, Lafayette, 94549. Bargains like this are hard to come by these days!



Coming Soon to a Computer Near You! The LHS Home Page—read all about it in the article on the next page.

LHS Home Page

This issue of the LHS newsletter inaugurates a regular column, *LHS Home Page*. I'd like to explain the intent of the column, and its title.

All members were sent a flyer early in April describing Lafayette Online, and the Society's participation in its program. As Marechal Duncan describes in this month's President's Message, the project will make the material this Society has in its archives available to any and all comers over the Internet, or more specifically, the World Wide Web portion of the Internet, using facilities provided by Lafayette Online. In this column, I'll be summarizing our progress in the initial setup of our "web site", including info on who's involved, our schedule for the setup, and feedback we receive from others in the community. I'll also try to answer members' questions about this project, and the Internet in general.

The words "Home Page" in the column's title reflect a bit of Internet arcana. Each place, or site, on the World Wide Web has what is called a "Home Page" in the language of the 'Net. All information made accessible at that site is reached from the home page. The Lafayette Historical Society will have its own home page on a Lafayette Online computer.

Thus, *LHS Home Page*.

Now, on to the subject at hand.

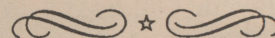
The first general meeting of interested Society members with leaders and planners from Lafayette Online was held April 18, 1996 in the Stanley School computer lab. 15 to 20 members attended, all of whom had the opportunity to "Surf the Net" under the guidance of Tim McCreery and Bob Gianini (both mentioned in Marechal Duncan's piece), with assistance from 4 students. Already, a coordinator has been hired by Lafayette Online to shepherd the project. She also attended. Tim and Bob had prepared a list of "historic" Internet sites to visit, that is sites which contain historical information, giving each of us a chance to browse through presentations of history that others had done.

The content, organization and presentation of materials from our archives will largely be decided by the Society, in the persons of those who

are interested in the project, and attend the meetings.

The first such working meeting will be on April 25th, with the objective of preparing an outline of the material to be available from the Home Page.

The second introduction/planning meeting will be held Thursday, May 2nd, 7 PM in room 502 at Stanley School. Since we hope this newsletter will be in your hands by then, we're including this announcement of the meeting. All who support Lafayette Online's vision of Lafayette as a Life-long, Online Learning community are urged to attend. Don't let any shortage of knowledge about computers or the Internet stand in your way! Please call Gary Willcuts, 283-0706, for further information.



Unexpected Greatness at Gettysburg

The Lafayette Historical Society recently gathered for an outstanding performance by Wayne Korsinen, recreating the scene of President Abraham Lincoln's 25 hours in Gettysburg, where he dedicated a National Cemetery. Mr. Korsinen, impersonating President Lincoln's personal secretary, John Hay, gave an "eyewitness account" of events preceding and following the occasion which saw Lincoln's unpretentious speech become one of the great orations of U. S. history. Mr. Korsinen's presentation included a recital of the Gettysburg Address, itself.

Wayne Korsinen, who has performed before the Lafayette Historical Society twice before, has been an instructor of American History at Antioch High School for over 30 years. He has long been interested in historical presentations.

Nearly 50 members and guests attended the March program, held at the Lafayette Christian Church. Arrangements for the facility were made by Wilbur Somerton, chair of the Archive Committee.

- by Keith Blakeney

"Old Betsy"—Back On the Road Again

As the "care taker" of the Fire Engine, Old Betsy, I must say THANKS to all of the members and friends who have contributed to the restoration of this Model T Ford. Some of the restoration work has been completed, some has yet to be started. What follows is a brief progress report on the restoration work.

The Engine's engine is again connected to the rear axle through the transmission, with the spline coupling in place. The drive shaft had a slight bend in it, causing a slight wobble at its coupling with the spline as the shaft turned. This wobble eventually caused the failure of a pin holding the spline coupling in place. That pin has failed three times since the Society acquired the fire engine. Previous owners had tried to solve the problem by welding the coupling in place; they never straightened the drive shaft.

Enter Charlie Cleland, of Oakland, a retired glazier and fine machinist (Charlie's wife and June Wasson are cousins). Thanks to Charlie's efforts, a correct analysis of the cause of failure was made, and the repair completed. Charlie has also built and installed a tow bar on the front axle of the fire engine. Now we can easily tow the fire engine, and not have to rely on driving it from place to place.

Next, the rear brakes and rear axle grease seals need to be fixed. This will put Old Betsy back in running condition. Another retired mechanic, experienced with Model T's, has the parts we need and will do the installation.

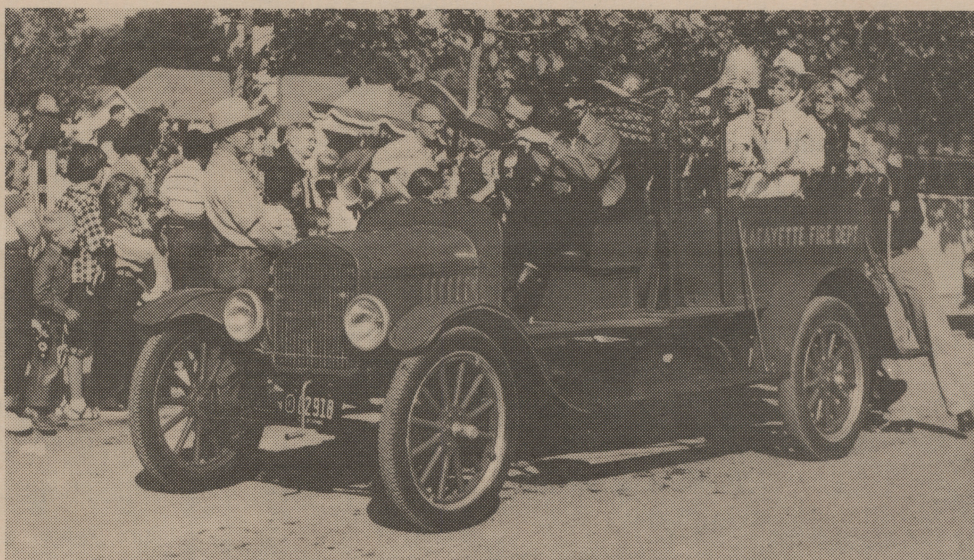
The Lafayette Concours d'Elegance, to be held at Acalanes High School on Sunday, July 14, 1996, will have as its theme, "The Faces of Ford". Our Society has been invited to show the Fire

Engine at that event. This adds a doubled sense of urgency to completion of the engine and body repairs, as the Lafayette Historical Society will be selling tickets to the Concours, retaining a portion of the proceeds. (If you would like tickets, please call George Wasson, 283-4420).

Help is needed! Anyone interested in the mechanics of the Model T, or in replacing and restoring wooden parts of Old Betsy, should contact George Wasson to be a part of the restoration process.

Thanks again to those who have continued to support the restoration and repair of Lafayette's first motorized fire engine.

-by George Wasson



Cutouts for Kids

We're looking for someone who'd like to design a cut-it-out, put-it-together-version of an historical Lafayette building. When printed on heavy paper with suitable instructions, this would be ideal for small children's use in learning about Lafayette history. If you have suggestions, or to *volunteer*, please call Ruth Dyer, 283-8312.

Farmer Sanford

The subject of our memoir was born in Atchison County, Missouri, February 2, 1851. When he was but a child of two years, his parents emigrated across the plains, arrived in Contra Costa County in September, 1852, and first located about one mile from the present site of the town of Walnut Creek. Here his parents resided for one year, and then moved to Martinez, where they remained for two years.

His father next moved to, and purchased the hotel at Lafayette, where he followed hotel-keeping until 1859. His parents then embarked in farming.

Mr. Sanford was educated in the common schools of Contra Costa County, and may be termed a pioneer, as here he has spent his childhood, youth, and now, in the prime of manhood, is one of Walnut Creek's most enterprising business men. In 1878, he located in Walnut Creek, and purchased his present property, and opened his livery and feed stable, located on Main street, near Rogers' Hotel.

He is also the present efficient Constable of Township Number Two, having been elected in 1879. Was united in marriage in Concord, September 12, 1877, to Miss Kitty Downing, a native of California. They have one child, a daughter, Evelyn D.

(From *History of Contra Costa County*, W. A. Slocum & Co., 1882.)

- researched by Ray Peters

Ready to Travel—the Third Grade History Trunk

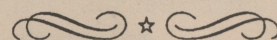
The history "trunk" for third grade students in the Lafayette schools has come together, and is now ready to go into the hands of the children and their teachers. The "trunk" (a large plastic box with hinged lid) will travel from school to school.

It contains items donated by Historical Society members and others in the community, plus some items discovered at a recent flea market.

In addition to the "trunk", each school will receive a set of pictures copied from our photo files, depicting key scenes of early Lafayette.

Thanks to all of those who contributed to this special project. Your efforts will help to bring a greater understanding and appreciation of Lafayette history to the children of our community.

- by Nancy Flood



Campaign '96

While many of us have heard that a couple of 'east-of-the-mountains' politicians are vying for residency privileges at some prime real estate along Pennsylvania Avenue, *all of us know the real race in '96 is right here in Lafayette!* We refer, of course, to the annual Lafayette Historical Society election of Directors to serve us for years to come. (Term limits do not apply.) Each year, at the annual pot-luck dinner, one-third of the Board stands for election to a 3 year term. Those on the ballot this year, listed alphabetically, are:

Keith Blakeney

Ruth Dyer

Ollie Hamlin

Ray Peters

Further, if a director has resigned before the end of his/her term, the Board nominates a replacement candidate who, upon election, fills out the remainder of the former Director's term. Nominated to fill out the remaining 2 years of former directors' terms are:

Elizabeth Johnston, replacing Sheila Piriano

Gary Willcuts, replacing Elly Conrad

1995/96 Board of Directors and Committee Chairs

Board of Directors

Marechal Duncan	President
Nancy Flood	Vice President
Sheila Piriano	Treasurer
Ruth Dyer	Recording Secretary
Oliver Hamlin	Corresponding Secretary
Keith Blakeney	
Elly Conrad	
Ray Peters	
Bill Somerton	
Joseph VanOverveen	
Bill Wakeman	
Gary Willcuts	

Committee Chairs

Annual Potluck Dinner	Richard Johnson
Archives & Historical Displays	Bill Somerton
Book Sales	Ruth Dyer
Fire Engine	George Wasson
Historian	Bill Wakeman
Membership	Oliver Hamlin
Newsletter Editor	Gary Willcuts
Newsletter Mailing	Ruby & James Sturman
Oral Historian	Nancy Flood
Plaza Park	Ray Peters
Programs	Keith Blakeney
Walking Tours	Bill Wakeman

Cut here

Lafayette Historical Society

MEMBER INFORMATION

(For multiple names/addresses, please photocopy this form.)

Name: _____ Spouse: _____

Address: _____ City/State/Zip _____

Home Phone: _____ Daytime phone: _____

Membership Categories and annual dues
(please check one):

_____ Student membership	\$ 2.50
_____ Family membership	\$ 10.00
_____ Business membership	\$ 50.00
_____ Life membership	\$100.00

Make check payable to **Lafayette Historical Society** and mail to
P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, California 94549

DUES \$ _____

Contribution to fire engine
maintenance \$ _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

Please indicate your areas of special interest:

_____ Annual Dinner Committee	_____ Archives	_____ Computers
_____ Displays	_____ Fire Engine	_____ Landmarks
_____ Newspaper Clippings	_____ Oral History	_____ Photograph Collection
_____ Programs & Trips	_____ Research	_____ Telephone Committee
_____ Walking Tours	_____ Other _____	

LHS Calendar

May—Annual Potluck Dinner

Date/Time

Tuesday, May 14, 1996, 6 PM

Place

Lafayette Veterans Hall

See front page article.

July—Railroad Museum Tour

Date/Time

Saturday, July 13, 1996

Details to follow

July—"Old Betsy" at Lafayette Concours d'Elegance

Date/Time

Sunday, July 14, 1996

Call George Wasson
283-4420

Summer, 1996—Mare Island Naval Shipyard Revisited

A repeat of the very successful January tour is being planned.

September—John Muir Home Tour

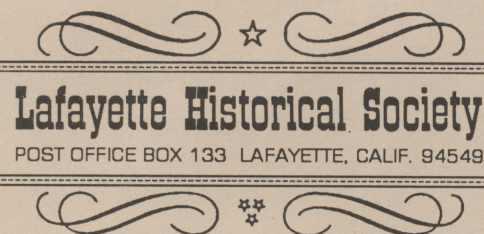
Tour will include luncheon in Martinez

Date/Time

Saturday, September 21, 1996

Details to follow

Anyone interested in obtaining information about activities of, or membership in, the Lafayette Historical Society is invited to contact Oliver Hamlin, 283-6822.



Gary Willcuts
1343 Martino Road
Lafayette Ca 94549

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